Miami-Dade County Media Relations Guidebook

Updated August 29, 2003

Media - Steps to Getting the Most Out of the Media

1. Develop a media resource inventory *(you should request the Media Guide from the Communications Department and update it with your own, personal contact information)*

2. Design an overall media plan.
    - Outline how your department/division can benefit the media resource and vice versa.
    - Decide what types of coverage you will be interested in (e.g. talk shows or features stories on a news program).

3. Make contact with the right people.
    - Designate a media specialist(s) in department who will be the main contact person(s) or spokesperson (PIO, Manager, Director)
    - Find out who are the key people in Radio/TV and Newspaper.
    - Write a letter of introduction.

4. Keep an organized record of all contact and coverage.
    - Keep a record of all media contacts in your community.
    - Collect or record all coverage of your activities and issues by the media.

Media - Developing a Media Resource Inventory

1. What is a media resource inventory?

A media resource inventory is a comprehensive list of all newspaper, radio stations, TV channels and contact persons appropriate to the community target audience. *The Communications Department has a Media Guide which is updated two times a year. You should add your own contact information to this guide. Email Adrien Castanet for copy* *adrc@miamidade.gov*

2. Why is it important to have the Media Guide and/or develop your own?

You do not want to miss important opportunities in channels of communication because you are not aware that they exist.

Media Opportunities

Television Airtime Opportunities

Public Service Opportunities

- Public Service Announcements (PSAs) - Many stations broadcast PSAs for non-profit community organizations and county departments/initiatives
- Community Calendar Announcements -Stations maintain a special time slot in which community groups and county departments can publicize the date, time and location for specific events

Editorial Opportunities

- Community Viewpoint Editorials - Opinion messages delivered by members of the community and county officials/employees on issues of public concern may be broadcast under different titles, such as "Point of View" or "Free Speech Message".
- Management Editorials - A station may regularly take public stands on community issues, and broadcast management editorials. Sometimes these positions can be influenced by members of the community and our county PIO's/officials.

News and Public Affairs Opportunities

- Daily News Programs - Coverage of your event or department in the news can bring broad exposure and interest. Many TV stations broadcast four or five news programs a day.
- Weekly Public Affairs Interview Programs - These generally focus on one news issue. It is easy to gain access, but small audience.

Entertainment Programming Opportunities

- Entertainment Talk Programs - These offer a mix of light and serious topics and guests. They can help generate a broad interest and can be easy to access.
- Entertainment Magazine Programs - Some stations produce weekly or nightly magazine programs that present reports on local community life. Usually these are light and entertaining, but they sometimes touch on issues of local importance.

Radio Airtime Opportunities

Public Service Airtime

- Public Service Announcements (PSAs) - Stations will produce and/or broadcast public service announcements for non-profit agencies and county departments.
- Management Editorials - Some stations take public positions on issues of community importance. You can either get the manager to deliver an editorial on your cause or let a spokesperson from your department deliver one.
- Community Calendar - Like TV Stations, most radio stations will accept announcements of upcoming community events.

News and Public Affairs

- Daily News Reports - Radio stations with an all-news format (WLRN, WIOD) offer the most opportunities, but most stations at least broadcast short news reports throughout the day.
- Weekly Public Affairs Programs - These programs are usually in one-on-one or group interview format. They are generally broadcast early or late, to a small audience. Joe Cooper's Topical Currents, WLRN
- Special Programs - Stations with an all-news format may produce special half-hour or longer reports at regular intervals.

Entertainment Programming

- Disc Jockey Shows - Some DJs have guests on their shows, or may incorporate promotional messages and activities in their show if they believe in your cause.
- Call-In Shows - Call-in hosts can give excellent exposure to any cause they find intriguing, especially if the host invites a county official or PIO from your department to be interviewed on the air.
- Special Remote Broadcasts - Some stations frequently broadcast "on location" at shopping malls, community centers, and can promote special community events by broadcasting live from the location of the event.

Newspaper Opportunities

News and News Features

- News Stories - Have on hand names of editors and reporters for fast coverage of your events.
- Feature Stories - In-depth stories may appear in weekly or daily papers.
- Special Series - Daily newspapers are often on the lookout for appropriate subjects for multi-part special reports, which they often promote heavily.
- Specialized Sections - If special sections such as Business, Food or Health provide appropriate settings for your information, keep names of their editors handy. They may accept features or regular columns for your department if they are of a high quality.

Editorial Coverage

- Newspaper Editorial - Editorial writers may be willing to endorse community-wide events or campaigns. On other occasions, they may provide space for interested parties to present rebuttals to positions the paper has taken.
- Guest Opinion - Daily and weekly papers may accept guest columns on matters of local concern.
- Columns - Some newspaper columnists reach a wide and loyal readership.
- Letters to the Editor - Careful and restrained use of letters to the editor can bring issues alive in a community, rebut negative forces and provide a vehicle for thanking those who have helped in your cause.
- Community Service Space - Newspapers often devote space regularly to news of local non-profit organizations and county programs/services. Although these pages may not have wide readership, they can help your keep your department and the county in the public eye and provide a good way of bestowing public recognition on hard-working staff and volunteers.
- Community Calendars - These will offer free listings of upcoming events.

Community News - Many papers have sections giving news of meetings, appointments, past events or future plans.

Media - Key Media People to Know

After finding out your media opportunity options and making contact with the right people, provide each contact person with a packet of information about the event or issue you want to highlight in order to help the media report it accurately.

Key People to Know - Television and Radio

- Public Service/Community Relations Director - Contact for PSAs, Free Speech Messages, editorial rebuttals, pubic affairs talk shows or community calendar listings.
- Promotion Director (Sometimes Creative Services or Community Relations or Public Affairs Director) - Contact for developing a station-wide promotional campaign for your department or series of events. The Promotion Director's job is to promote the station through marketing and community relations, and sometimes works with the Marketing Representative.
- News Director/Assignment Editor - Determines what news goes on the air, news releases.
- Editorial Director - Contact to offer editorial comment or to respond to a station editorial.
- Community Bulletin Board Director - Contact for announcing meetings for other department events.
- Program Director - In a large radio or TV station, this person is in charge of all programming except news. For examples, this person is in charge of special documentaries, magazine-type programs.
- Sales Manager - This person is responsible for selling airtime and may be called Marketing Manager.

Key People to Know - Newspaper

- City Editor/Assignment Editor - Like the News Director at a broadcast station, the City Editor at the newspaper determines what news to include in the paper. A larger paper will have a City Desk that includes an Assignment Editor who coordinates the day-to-day job of assigning stories.
- Features Editor - If the newspaper is large enough to have different sections, many of them may be under the overall direction of the Features Editor, with specific editors for different topics.
- Business Editor/Sports Editor - Most newspapers have separate sections for both business and sports. These sections may present new opportunities to focus on cancer or health in general.
- Advertising Director - This person is in charge of all advertising. This person can help you with ideas for your ad design, size selection and mechanical preparation.

- Photo Editor

Other Key People

- Reporters of certain beats (Political Beat, Black Affairs)
- Editors of community calendars – *see Communications Department for a list*
- Editor of the op/ed (opposing editorial) page
- Appropriate columnists

Hints for maintaining relationships with key media people

- Be organized. Keep a record of the media contacts in your community.
- Collect or record the coverage of your department activities and other issues that the media covers, if you wish. Include press clippings, and the date, time and station of relevant television, cable or radio broadcasts. Tracking media coverage is important to show them that you are familiar with their previous coverage of your issue. *News clip are available on the intranet and video clips can be ordered from Marlene Mingo, MDTV, 305-375-3733.*
- Thank those who support your cause. A note or letter of appreciation can mean a lot!

Media - "Dos and Don'ts" For Dealing with the Media

1. Do be proactive in your dealings with the news media.

- Identify three news operations you plan to work with.
- Introduce yourself and your department.
- Find out if there is a specific contact person.

2. Do be aware of lead times.

- Call when you are beginning your planning.

3. Do send (fax and email if possible) your announcement to appropriate news media.

- Determine the size of your audience (local, state wide)

4. Don't send out your news release and forget about it.

- Follow up quickly. Call within a day to make sure the announcement was received.

5. Don't call an editor or reporter when they are on a deadline.

- when calling, ask the reporter if they have time to talk.

6. Do be available when a reporter calls.

7. Do tell the news media why your release is important to their readers and viewers.

- If a photo opportunity is involved, tell the media dates and times the event will occur. Be prepared to give accurate directions to the facility.

8. Be Accessible.

9. Do make media calls as an event nears, but do not be pushy or demand coverage. Instead, ask if they are aware and if they need additional information. Then, express your desire for their attendance at an event.

10. Do call and ask how the day's first block story list is shaping up. This helps one get a feel for the kind of news day it will be and when stories impacting the county will run.

During a Crisis: 10 Most Important Rules

The most important communications strategy in a crisis, particularly in the first few hours, is to be open with the public by being available to the news media. *Perception is truth and the media creates the perception following a crisis*. For those who would even think of implementing a "no comment" philosophy with the media, I offer this fact: The trade journal, PR News, cites a survey that says 65 percent of the public takes "no comment" as an admission of guilt.

Here are the 10 most important rules of crisis communications:

1. Your department should have an in-depth crisis communications plan that includes dealing with the media, the community and your employees.

2. Make sure the crisis team has been professionally trained in doing hard news interviews.

3. Name a spokesperson and two back-ups today. Do not wait for the crisis to occur.

4. Deal with the crisis head-on. Do not hide out.

5. Respond to reporters' questions immediately. They expect a return call or an on-site interview within 10 minutes of the request.

6. Never lie. The big lie would be stupid but many executives tend to tell the little white lie. When you even think of telling a lie in a crisis situation, say the name "Richard Nixon."

7. Never go off the record. In a crisis there is already much confusion. Do not add to it. Tell a reporter only what you want to see on the front page of the local paper.

8. Have media kits already prepared and in the crisis room ready for distribution.

9. Practice implementing your crisis plan by going through a mock crisis once a year. Do not forget the news media element during the practice.

10. Have the Boy Scout motto nicely printed and place it on your office wall where you must look at it every day: "Be prepared."

11, Information, Information, Information is the key to managing a crisis. An informed public is a calmer public.

Tips for Handling Reporters

People, who probably never thought they would be giving an interview to a news reporter, may someday soon find themselves facing a camera and microphone or a phone call from a print journalist on deadline. Before you gulp and say “no comment,” a request for an interview is not always indicative or adversarial or negative circumstances. Even in what may be a crisis situation for you, the media offers the opportunity to reach a vast audience with your own words and images.

- **Don’t use jargon.** Every industry or profession has its own unique language. Remember who your targeted audience is, and communicate in language they will understand. Your audience may not understand about risk assessment or cost benefit analysis or regulatory relief legislation, but they do understand issues that hit them personally.
- **Don’t say “no comment.”** It implies confirmation of the question. “Mr. Smith says you discriminated against Mr. Jones.” You reply, “No comment.” The audience interprets that as guilt or a cover-up. The rule of thumb for responding is to explain why you can’t respond and then offer other useful information. “I can’t respond directly to that because it would violate my our employee’s right to privacy (or whatever the reason is); however, what I can tell you is that we have an outstanding public record in this area that we’re proud of, and our employees and clients tell us that they’re very satisfied with our responsiveness and attention to their needs.”
- **Be pro-active.** Just responding to queries isn’t enough. Suggest story ideas to reporters. Help them understand the issues and how they affect the interests of the general public.
- **Be careful of how you use numbers.** They are confusing to the listener unless you help the audience to understand what the numbers mean. Why are the numbers significant? Is it a trend? Are things better or worse? Use an analogy to help the listener grasp the significance of the numbers.
- **Be relentlessly and aggressively positive about your position.** It’s easy to fall into a defensive position. Your job is to use the media opportunity to sell your position or ideas -- not apologize for them!
- **Look at the question as a jumping-off point**, not as a set of limiting parameters. Most people only answer the question. They don’t see the question as an opportunity to articulate an agenda.
- **Tell anecdotes.** Since the beginning of time, the most effective communicators have been storytellers. Learn how to illustrate your point with an example or anecdote which helps the listener to visualize and empathize with your position. Help the listener to identify with your anecdote.
- **Use your residents as testimonials.** Look outside the county staff for third party validation. These testimonials broaden your group of trained spokespersons. Trained and well-briefed individuals who can give compelling interviews should be promoted to the media as industry

experts capable of discussing a wide range of timely topics. Although they may be called on by the media to respond to a specific issue, such as a proposed change in a local ordinance, the well-trained spokesperson also promotes the professionalism and role of the community.

- When getting questions about potentially sensitive issues and asked “what do you know about x, y and z?” turn the question around and ask what do you know.

What do the media want?

Newspapers and magazines, radio and television companies, receive a vast quantity of material every day of the year. It comes in many different forms. These include announcements from companies, government departments, research institutes and other bodies; material from national and international news agencies (Reuters, for example); and releases from public relations firms representing their clients' interests. The lay media also gain ideas from specialized publications. Sheer pressure on space and broadcasting time means that journalists can use only a tiny proportion of the information they receive through these various channels. How, then, do they choose what to cover?

Journalists and their 'gate-keepers' are receptive to novelty. The general media also feed off each other to a surprising degree, and they work to unwritten menus of topics that appeal to them at any one time. Stories about environmental pollution, for example, may be keenly sought this year but may be less popular with journalists and their editors next year. In engaging the interest of the media, it is helpful to be aware of what subjects are currently favored on their agenda. Some of the most skillful initiatives in "placing" stories in the media are taken by people who see opportunities for providing new angles on stories that are already running strongly.

There is fierce competition within the media. Newspapers, for example, compete for readers and for advertising revenue. Many journalists also have an appetite for occasional "exclusive" stories which, if they are considered to be sufficiently important, their competitors will then have to follow up.

Dealing with journalists

Journalists, and certainly those dealing with news, are invariably in a hurry. For those working in newspapers and broadcasting, this haste is entirely genuine. They may well be pursuing several stories in a single day, against the clock. But rapidity is also built into the media culture, so that anything (an interview, a photograph...) tends to be wanted instantly.

There are also more practical considerations if your story or message is to appear in the media when you want it too and if at all. Newspapers usually have two internal news conferences to determine what will be in the paper the next day. If a press release misses the early evening conference, your story is unlikely to make it to print the next day unless it really is important. The best time of the day to contact a news desk is early to mid morning, yet this may not be suitable for an evening paper or a lunchtime radio or television news bulletin. The shelf life of a story is also painfully short: a county department releases its results of a particular survey or program on a Friday afternoon; by the time of the next possible major news outlet on Monday, it will be considered old news and unlikely to get a place in the schedule. Afternoon press conferences are not always a good way of getting communications into the media, and especially not on a Friday.

In reality, while journalists greatly appreciate an immediate response, it is perfectly reasonable that anyone approached by a reporter should ask for time to consider the request and how to respond.

If a journalist approaches you, in person or by telephone, make sure from the outset that you really understand what they want, what publication or program they represent and how they propose to use any comments you make. In the case of radio and television, you should find out whether a proposed interview will be live or recorded what the format of the program is and who else will be taking part.

Even if you are satisfied on these points, you may want to collect your thoughts. Ask the caller to ring back in 20-30 minutes. Alternatively, say that you will return the call but be absolutely sure that you do so. During the interim, you can also consult colleagues. Other department PIO's can also be invaluable in providing guidance about particular journalists, publications and programs and their past track-record. If it's a big media issue, please make sure you contact the Media Relations Manager and/or the Communications Director via email or phone.

In the long-term, some people find it mutually rewarding to become acquainted with individual journalists who deal with their issues, whether nationally or locally. While this should certainly not provide automatic channels through which to gain media publicity, such relationships can be of value to both parties and increase mutual confidence.

There are several scenarios in which you may find yourself dealing with the media. These range from a conference at which you are delivering a paper, to a telephone call from a journalist asking about the department or placing a public records request. If there is a choice, it is more satisfactory and reassuring to meet a journalist face-to-face than to respond to a voice on the telephone. Paradoxically, some of us are more easily tempted on the telephone into saying more than we would have wished.

A person may, on very rare occasions, be best advised not to speak to a journalist at all for example, one who has a long record of serious misrepresentation. There are obvious dangers in declining an interview, however. Bear in mind too that it is entirely reasonable that a journalist should wish to talk to you. Be very cautious about total refusal.

If you are tempted to decline an interview simply because you are busy and can scarcely spare the time, remember that the journalist will go elsewhere. He or she may turn to someone who is less qualified to speak with real authority on the subject. Either way, you may wish to seek guidance from the Communications Director and the Media Relations Manager.

Even when you are speaking to specialist reporters who cover your expertise regularly, remember that terms and ideas which are very familiar to you may be new to them and thus require careful explanation. A general reporter will know very little at all. So do not assume much knowledge on the part of the interviewer, and do not worry about "talking down" to a journalist. It is far better to do this than to use your department’s jargon without any explanation. Choose commonplace words wherever possible. If technical terms are unavoidable, explain those perhaps using metaphors or analogies to get over difficult concepts.

Keys to a Successful Interview or Statement:-

- Be well briefed
- Plan the points you wish to make and your responses to standard questions and arguments
- If you are in doubt, be prepared to say "I don't know"
- Be as open as possible and never lie
- Do not say "No comment", there is always something more useful which can be said
- Show concern if there is a genuine problem
- Show your department is addressing the situation or issue
- Be as positive as possible without sounding callous and uncaring
- Beware of admitting liability
- Have a list with contact details of trained spokes-people within your department available to make statements on specific questions

Remember that a journalist is unlikely to stick solely to the specific topic of the interview. He or she may also pose questions about other related matters. In preparing for the interview, think about the questions a reader or listener would expect to be raised and to have answered.

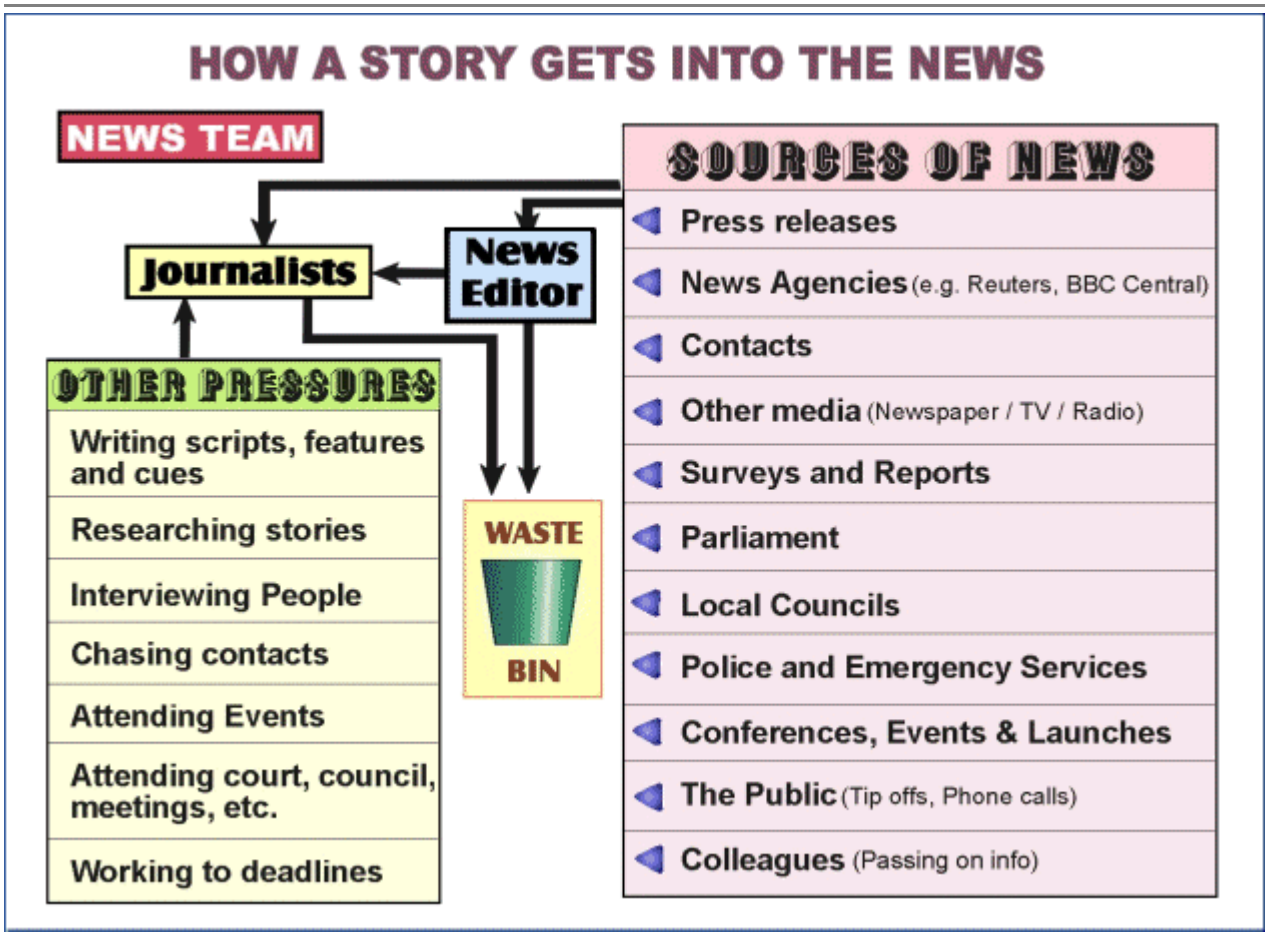
The most satisfactory basis for an interview from the standpoint of both parties is "on the record". This means that the journalist can use and quote anything that you say. But there may be occasions when you prefer to conduct an entire interview, or part of it, "off the record" or "non-attributably". It is important to reach an unambiguous agreement in advance about the conditions of the interview. 99 journalists out of 100 will respect any form of confidence you agree. Never use the expression "No comment". There is always something less evasive that you can say.

Press conferences and releases

At a formal press conference journalists are invited to hear about the introduction of some new program/service or to deal with a hot, ongoing media issue. Before a press conference, a PIO should help prepare a "hand-out" sheet giving key points and the background to the announcement. Written notes of this sort are invaluable, as they are also on other occasions when you are interviewed by an individual journalist. As well as your name and position, a briefing sheet can contain information about the specifics of a program or service your department offers. This will be particularly useful for the general reporter who knows virtually nothing about the subject for example, a local newspaper or radio journalist (who may even welcome a short list of key questions that he or she should ask you).

Press releases should also contain information about how to contact the key individual(s) involved who must be available to be contacted through telephone or e-mail at the time as indicated. They are usually embargoed, with a date and time before which the contents of the release must not be used.

The importance of effective press releases can hardly be exaggerated. Releases which describe developments of timely interest to journalists, which are clearly written and which contain all of the formal ingredients outlined above, are used far more widely than those which are deficient in these respects. Moreover, a department that issues only well-prepared releases, carrying genuine news, encourages journalists to pay immediate attention to future releases from the same place. Press releases are not usually published verbatim, but they should be written in a style such that they could be when time is extremely short, for example.


HOW A STORY GETS INTO THE NEWS
NEWS TEAM
Journalists
News Editor
OTHER PRESSURES
Writing scripts, features and cues
Researching stories
Interviewing People
Chasing contacts
Attending Events
Attending court, council, meetings, etc.
Working to deadlines
WASTE
BIN
SOURCES OF NEWS
Press releases
News Agencies (e.g. Reuters, BBC Central)
Contacts
Other media (Newspaper / TV / Radio)
Surveys and Reports
Parliament
Local Councils
Police and Emergency Services
Conferences, Events & Launches
The Public (Tip offs, Phone calls)
Colleagues (Passing on info)

Newspapers: The Black and White on Getting into Print

1. Op-Ed Pieces

Local newspapers have a page devoted to opinion and analysis of current issues by knowledgeable persons from around the community and in some cases, around the country. On weekdays it is located opposite the editorial page hence named “op-ed”. Many newspapers also devote entire sections in their weekend editions for this purpose.

Submitting articles to the op-ed section of local or national newspapers is probably the best means available to our community to influence the perceptions of the media and the general public. If you follow these basic procedural and substantive guidelines, it is more likely that your thoughts will be published and reach your intended audience.

On Procedure

Observe the specific guidelines of the newspaper for submitting op-ed pieces, or your piece may not be read. Each newspaper has its own requirements concerning word length and means of submission. As a rule, weekday editions accept articles between 700 and 900 words in length, while weekend sections often publish slightly longer and more analytical pieces. However, our local papers including the Sun Sentinel and the Miami Herald typically like articles less than 400 words. Some newspapers accept articles by fax: others prefer submission by mail. Call the newspaper’s op-ed department for its specific procedures.

Include a SHORT cover letter with your article, addressing the editorial or op-ed page editor by name. Include a sentence or two on yourself, your department, and on the topic you are writing, but do not go into elaborate descriptions of your background or the subject matter. Do include your telephone number, because if the editor decides to use your piece, he or she may want to call you.

Make absolutely certain there are no spelling, typographical, or grammatical errors in your article and cover letter. Typing and layout should appear neat and professional.

Your article cannot be published in more than one newspaper because of copy right laws. If you send your paper to several at the same time and one of them decides to run it, contact the others immediately and tell them you are withdrawing it from consideration.

On Substance

Get to the point quickly. Do not take up too much space in the beginning of the article introducing your subject. Your main thesis should be stated at the outset and then elaborated upon rather than the reverse.

Stay within established intellectual parameters. If you include ideas considered to be on the “fringe” of acceptable debate, such as conspiracy theories and the like, the editor will not read any further and will automatically reject your piece.

If you wish to introduce a new concept or state a fact which is not widely known, you must explain it logically and prove its validity in a convincing manner. Such points must be fully presented, not assumed or woven into the language.

Be topical. Do not use up a lot of space rehashing historical arguments unless they are new to your intended readers and impact directly upon the current frame of debate. Otherwise, historical references should be made only in passing.

Stay on cutting edge. Dramatic changes occur in the world every week and sometimes even on a daily basis, and current frameworks of discussion vary accordingly. Train your eye to the future and not to the past; keep your ideas one step ahead of the news rather than one step behind it.

Be careful with adjectives, as their overuse is often interpreted as emotional or propagandistic. Even if you are not objective, try to write so that your conclusions appear to be arrived at objectively.

2. Letters to the Editor

In most newspapers, Letters to the Editor are written in response to a news article, editorial or ed-op piece already published, but not always. Check your newspaper for its specific format.

Send your letter to the editorial page editor and include your name, address and telephone number. The salutation should read “To the Editor”. Again avoid grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors. The typing and layout should be neat and professional.

Keep it short and concise. If you are responding to an article that was published in the newspaper, your very first sentence should refer to the author and title of the piece, the thesis that you disagree with, and (in parenthesis) the date and section of publication. Then, state your point and explain it in clear and logical fashion, in 400 words or less. Under no circumstances should you address more than one subject in one letter, as this will appear to the editors as rambling.

Submitting your letter by E-mail:

Most major newspapers already have internet sites with many more being added daily. These sites usually have E-mail addresses of editorial staff and a special address for letters to the editor. Check your paper for details. Sending a letter to the editor or any other message you would like conveyed to the media via the internet is by far the fastest way of getting your message across. Some rules do apply however:

- You should be sending letters to the editor on behalf of your department from your work email. However, don't send a personal letter to the editor from your e-mail account at work unless you explicitly say that the opinions you are expressing are entirely yours and NOT that of your employer. Check with your DPO if there are any restrictions regarding use of your e-mail account for this purpose. Remember, it's public record! Sending an e-mail from work is like typing your letter to the editor on your company's letterhead.

- If you are sending your email through your home or school account the above rule does not apply but all the previous guidelines should be followed.

- The subject section of your e-mail will be the first thing that the person receiving your message will read. Make this as concise as possible.

- Always include a phone number where you can be contacted. If your letter is selected for publishing you should expect to receive an authentication call from the paper within the next two days.

3. Educating the Editors

Whether your local newspaper has tremendous promise, unabashed bias, or is somewhere in between, it is a good idea for your department to meet its editorial board in order to eliminate stereotypes and keep the newspaper abreast on issues of concern.

Bring together no more than three or four members of your department to meet with the editorial board of the newspaper. Those you choose as your representatives should be articulate and extremely knowledgeable about key issues.

Choose a particular topic of concern that is currently in the news, and tell the editors you want to discuss their future coverage of that topic. This is to get you in the door, which is difficult to do without a good rationale.

Ask them to write an editorial on that subject, espousing a particular position.

They will ask why they should take the position you are advocating, and you will have the chance to explain the issue to them at length. At the same time, you will be gradually educating them and eliminating myths that are harmful.

If you find the editors to be receptive and open-minded, arrange for the delegation to hold a follow-up meeting. The objective is to gradually reach a point where you are holding occasional but regular sessions with the editorial boards of your local newspapers.

If your representatives are extraordinarily well-informed, the editors might even begin to look upon them as informational resources. They will also be more likely to publish op-ed pieces these individuals may submit.

If you reach the point of regularized contact, you will be in a position to educate the editors on issues over a period of time. Eventually this will give you some influence over the way they perceive the larger picture and how to report to the public.

Maximize your Media Exposure and Minimize your Risk

Do

- Have a one sentence message you want to communicate no matter what is asked.
- Be alert and positive!
- Keep Calm. Don't let reporters start an argument with you. Look and sound calm and controlled. It's important.
- Stand still behind the microphone then use comfortable, appropriate gestures.
- Look the interviewer in the eye. Avoid looking at the ground, sky or the camera.
- Make your point in 20 seconds or less. Talk in complete sentences.
- Put your answers into words the public will understand. No jargon.
- Use examples to clarify your message. Especially ones that improve your position and that of the company.
- If your story is positive, offer information you want the public to know, even if the reporter doesn't ask.
- Be cooperative, however, know what you should and shouldn't say.

Don't

- Never say "No Comment." Whenever possible explain why you can't give the media the information that they are asking for.
- Don't let a reporter put words in your mouth; correct misstatements before you answer any questions.
- Don't say or do anything you don't want reported. There's really no such thing as "off the record."
- If the story is negative, don't give unnecessary information that may be detrimental. Answer only the questions you're asked.
- Don't speculate or talk about anything outside your area of expertise or known facts. It's OK to say "I don't know. I'll find out..."
- Avoid answering "what if" questions. Instead, respond with something like, "I wouldn't want to speculate on that, however..." and state your positive message.
- Don't fill in silent pauses. Say what you have to say, and stop!
- Don't keep talking as you're walking away. Stop talking before you walk

Tips for Dealing With the Media

When an incident occurs in your department, it is likely that reporters will want to find out more about it. To avoid speculation, hearsay, and a negative image caused by the press, there are several steps you can take to prepare for this encounter. Here are a few of them:

1. Have a press kit ready in advance. The press kit should be a folder which contains the history of your department and the situation, important phone numbers, and a list of positive things your department has done in the recent past.
2. Prepare short quotable passages. It is important to be brief so that you may avoid having your quotation altered or paraphrased to imply something other than what you directly meant.

   To be effective, choose the point or phrase that you most want to get across and put the following in front of it -- "Well, the most important thing is . . ." Reporters love that phrase and search for it in every story.

3. Practice dealing with reporters. Have a colleague or friend role play with you. Try to determine the types of questions you may be asked and then answer them. Have the other person try to follow up on the answers you gave.
4. Use humor IF YOU HAVE IT AND IT IS GOOD! Bad jokes are worse than none at all.
5. There is no shame in saying honestly "I don't know."
6. If there is a very difficult question you MAY ask to think about it for a minute.
7. Press the positive side of what you do.
8. Plan ahead. Have a 3x5 card with message points ready. This will help determine who will set the agenda for the interview. You want to assume control gently. You want to ensure that there is accurate news from you rather than a slanted story.
9. Utilize one consistent spokesperson.
10. Never talk off the record, especially without knowing the reporter. Don't say anything you don't want to see on the air or in print.
11. Do not ask to see the story before it goes to press -- the reporter won't let the source see it or control the story. However, before the reporters leave, do say "Let's review my quotes to make sure they're correct." This will give you a clue as to what the reporter selected and the angle the reporter has chosen (good, bad, or indifferent).

Make sure your message is heard

The media -- newspapers, radio and television -- will play an important role in the triumph or defeat of your issue. You will need to deal with the media to insure that:

- they understand the issue from your perspective;
- they call attention to the issue so that it does not elude the public's awareness;
- Your side of the story is presented correctly in any coverage that does develop.

The role of the media cannot be overemphasized. What they read and hear will determine what members of the public think and whether they will support or oppose what you are advocating -- even whether they hear about the issue at all.

Even if your ads are running in the newspapers, or commercials are appearing on radio and television, you still must contact the media with materials that explain and supplement the ads. It is important to generate news stories and to make sure the facts presented in them are correct.

Engage in activities such as open forums, debates, town meetings, meet-the-candidates night -- anything that will attract the attention of the media. At least a week before, mail or FAX a press release with time, place, speakers, etc. to every newspaper and radio and TV station.

In dealing with news people, your position should be that of presenting them with the other side of the story, with the facts as you see them. By doing this you will gain credibility -- you will be seen as a clear-thinking authority and not as a defensive or frightened person resorting to emotional or inflammatory tactics. But don't try to browbeat a reporter into accepting your opinion of the issue. He will be sensitive, and rightfully so, about his own ability to make judgments. If reporters do ask for an opinion, then be prepared to voice one clearly and quickly.

Your Job

Your primary job is to take the press kit to the editors of your local newspapers and to the news directors of your local radio and television stations. Call for an appointment first.

Your Campaign Strategy

Your campaign may include an extensive list of activities and materials, including the following:

- Newspaper advertising.
- Television and radio spots.
- Letters from various officials and other important groups.
- Fact files containing purely factual data on your position.
- Video productions.
- Press releases.

Your Press Kit

The press kit that you will provide to reporters/editors may contain a wide variety of material. It may include:

- General news stories about the topic, program or service.
- Fact sheets & tip sheets
- Contact information
- Goals and Principles of your department
- Miscellaneous information

Getting Ready to Meet the Press

Before you meet with editors and broadcasters, read the contents of your own press kits thoroughly so you'll understand the entire contents. You may be asked questions, so you should understand the issue thoroughly.

Next, compile a list of the editors of newspapers and the news directors of radio and television stations in your area. The easiest way is to use the Communication's Department Media Guide, or simply telephone the media and ask for the names. Knowing the specific writers on that beat at each paper is also helpful.

Groups of two to four people should make appointments with editors and broadcast news directors.

Explain when you call that you have an information kit pertaining to the relevant issue or program and that you'd like an appointment to discuss.

The Goal of Your Meeting

When you meet with the editors, your goal is to give them the kit, make sure they understand what the issue is about, and why your department is supportive or not. In essence, you want your side to be heard. Successfully stimulating accurate news coverage can help carry the true story to the public.

Publicity Do's and Don’ts

Planning and Preparation

Be even handed in all dealings with the media - and you will surely gain. Remember you can never order a reporter or photographer to attend an event. The media have their own priorities, but given consideration of their needs, can be very co-operative and supportive.

- Do give the media time to plan. Tell all your weekly press of your event at least two weeks in advance. If you think the local evening paper or radio/TV station may be interested, give them a call about three or four days ahead and a reminder call the morning of. I generally say something like, “Just wanted to make sure you received the media advisory about _____. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me. I hope to see you out there. It’ll be a really great event because _____.”
- Do make sure you know of all the media who cover your area and when their deadlines are (ask: they will readily tell you). Make certain you deliver your media advisory/press release well ahead of the deadline.
- Tell them briefly what is to happen, where and the time and give a name and telephone number who can be readily contacted day or evening. You must do this by media advisory and you could follow it up with a phone call.
- Always keep it brief, 60 - 200 well written words used in their entirety are far better than 500 - 700 cut down to fit the available space with the wrong emphasis and errors as a result.
- If writing a press release or advisory, or speaking to the media afterwards, do keep it simple. They do not have your depth of knowledge and will know little of the background. The reporter who reads or receives your release may not be the one you spoke to originally.

Checklist

- Half the problems in dealing with the media arise through genuine misunderstandings. Always double check your facts.
- Do make sure that anything in writing you submit has ALL of the key elements - who, when, why and what?
- Who opened the event/presented/spoke? (Everyone mentioned needs their correct title and full name - not initials)
- When did it/will it take place? Actual date not 'last week' or 'next month' and full description of location.
- Why is it happening? Summarize in one paragraph what your group achieved or is hoping to achieve.

- What took place or will take place? Describe briefly. If important people are to be present make sure you know their correct titles, correct spelling and reason for their involvement.
- Do build a relationship with your local media based on mutual consideration and courtesy. They are your best hope of regular coverage. They come out once a week whereas the evening, radio and TV appear daily, so try to plan coverage so that your weekly press is not "scooped".
- Try to issue releases and give notice of your event in ample time for their NEXT deadline. Then and only then send it to the other bigger media - the local press are generally very appreciative of such consideration and it does help to build bridges.
- Try to understand the respective news values of the different media. Your press conference or event may merit a report/photo in the local paper and might even rate a paragraph in the evening press - but it would never make radio or television. Keep that in mind when working the press for an event.
- **Even if your local press contacts are not willing to send a reporter or photographer to a particular event you may still get some coverage if you send a caption with photo afterwards.**

Don'ts

- Don't guess at anything when dealing with the media. Never pass on hearsay or rumor. Do not forecast what SHOULD happen next. Always refer the media back to the concerned person for clarification.
- Do not comment unless you are directly involved. Instead, politely suggest that the reporter contacts the concerned person directly.
- Similarly, even if you think the criticism unfair or outrageous do not respond. Often reporters seek out views in order to localize their story. Your views will be reported rebutting the complaints listed.

The Media Rules

1***. You aren't in control.***
You may be the master or mistress of your fate in your business, but you have absolutely no control over the use or placement of a news item you submit to the media. A story idea or news release you think is important may be nothing more than junk mail to an editor or reporter. And recognize that you can do everything right and still end up with the media doing a lousy job on your story.

2. Your advertising doesn't carry any weight.
Don't even think about demanding that a news item be used because your business is an advertiser. There is a long-standing, inherent hostility in the media between the news and advertising departments, especially at newspapers. Nothing turns off a reporter or editor more quickly than the suggestion that because you are an advertiser, your news should get special treatment.

3. You need to explain, explain and explain some more.
Chances are the reporter covering your story won't know much about the subject. It's your job to help educate the reporter about the topic, especially if it's a technical one, in the interests of accuracy. You may only have 10 or 15 minutes to do it, but you need to do it because you're the expert. Don't hesitate to ask the reporter if he or she understands. If not, explain it again.

4. This isn't the movies. There are no previews.
The media won't let you see, edit, correct or otherwise preview a story before its printed or aired. Don't embarrass yourself by asking, or threaten not to cooperate or to withhold information unless you have the right to approve what is used. It won't do you any good to try, unless your goal is to antagonize the media. (A reporter for a trade publication might ask you to check part of a story for technical accuracy, but even that's a rare occurrence.)

5. More isn't better.
Papering the newsroom with copies of your news release isn't going to assure that your news items are used. In fact, it's likely to get your organization's news consigned to the garbage can. Don't send duplicate copies of your news release to different people at a media organization. This can cause embarrassment to the media -- two different reporters get the release and write stories, which show up in the paper the same day. Make every effort to deal with just one person at each media outlet.

6. There's always another source.
Don't think you're the only source for a story about your business -- especially a negative one. If you won't talk, you can bet the reporter will find somebody who will. And the chances are that it will be somebody who doesn't know the whole story or who has an axe to grind.

7. Off the record? Don't go there.
"Off the record" doesn't exist. There is no such thing. You should respond to media questions as if everything you say is on the record and will be reported, and that includes any informal conversation before and after the formal interview. If you don't want to see it in print or hear it on the air, don't say it!

8.Truth or consequences!
Always tell the truth! You can skirt a sensitive question, but don't lie. A falsehood will inevitably come back to haunt you and your business. Don't risk the long-term consequences to your reputation by lying to the media.

9. Give 'em soundbites.
In preparing for any encounter with the media, develop a list of the key points you want to make. Then construct short, 15- to 20-second soundbites explaining those points. This approach will help you focus your message on what's really important.

10. "They really screwed it up! I should sue them."
Don't lose your cool if the media make an error in your story. If it's not really significant, forget it. If it is, politely point it out to the reporter and request a correction. If you aren't satisfied with the response, talk to the reporter's editor or news director. And if that doesn't work, be satisfied with pointing out the error in a letter to the editor or station manager. Don't forget that if you overreact, you could damage your relationship with the media outlet permanently -- and that this probably isn't the last story they'll do on your business.

Open, Honest Communication

Simple and naive as it may sound, the best approach with news media is to tell the plain truth and tell it promptly. Take the lead in delivering information, even when the content of the information is distasteful.

Some events will mean ongoing interaction with the news media. It's a good idea to set the tone for ongoing relationships with the media by being as open and honest as possible from the beginning. Journalists often suspect that persons who are evasive, difficult to reach, or close-mouthed may be covering up something. Confronted with a stonewall, good journalists will do whatever it takes to get past it; by pushing harder, by finding other, possibly less responsible, less reliable routes to the information they seek, or by speculation. It is hard to control a message when you don't deliver anything substantial.

Stick to the facts. Sometimes journalists want to make more of things than is there, but complete understanding usually takes time. Don't inadvertently encourage them to spot a trend where there is only one isolated case. Stick to the facts of each case and be careful not to try to interpret its meaning unless there is enough information to do so.

If, for whatever reason, your department has released incorrect information, correct it through official channels as soon as possible. Often, the least damaging way to deal with mistakes is to simply own up to them.

Identify the person(s) within your department who will speak on various issues relating to the dept., and make sure everyone is aware of who those people are, and what procedures must be followed.

The spokespeople should work closely with the PIO right from the beginning. It can be difficult, and potentially dangerous, to craft a coherent media strategy off the cuff. And since the first contact for many journalists is the PIO, a department can send a damaging message if that individual is ill-informed or utterly ignorant of the issue.

How to Plan Press Releases

The usual way to get information out to the media is to send out a press release. These are usually faxed, emailed or posted out to the media with a news story that you want them to cover. Use your judgment on whether to send out a press release.

Send them regularly, but bombarding editors for the sake of it will put them off. If you've missed deadlines, don't bother.

Tips for writing a press release:

- Mark NEWS RELEASE or MEDIA ADVISORY clearly at the top - plus your campaign name, phone number and county or department logo.
- Next, put date of issue and mark "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" unless it is embargoed (see below). When publicizing an event, make sure the press release is out well in advance.
- Use a snappy headline.
- Include a summary of the main facts in the first paragraph, including WHAT is happening, WHERE, WHY, WHEN and by WHOM. It needs to immediately grab an Editor's attention or will be binned.
- The press release should be short, factual and well-written. Avoid opinionated rants, county acronyms and jargon.
- Use short paragraphs and simple sentences. Keep to one, or two at most, pages.
- Use a quote by an identified person to tell your side of the story.
- Write ENDS at the foot of the press release.

Ensure that there is a reliable contact with phone number on the release. This could include on- site and cellular phone numbers. If you want the contact details printed in newspapers it must be in the main body of the text. If your press release is for an event, press conference or photo opportunity, include a map or directions.

If you do not want to go into massive detail on an issue in the main body of the text, but think it is of interest, include a **Note to the Editor** section at the end of the press release.

An embargo is a note at the top of the press release telling journalists not to leak or print the story before a particular deadline.

Follow the press release up with a phone call to make sure that it was received

The care and feeding of the media

Dealing with the media doesn't have to be a painful process. Often they're not sure of the subject matter and may feel as intimidated as you are!

Here are a few tips:

- Designate someone to act as the media 'spokesperson.' Whether this is a PIO or Director, make sure this person is well versed with the subject matter. Choose someone who is well-spoken and knows the facts but speaks in layman's terms. This person does not have to be the top person in charge; the position is not necessarily the most important criterion.
- When dealing with the media, you'll have to answer the basics: Who; what; when; where; why; and how.
- Be prepared! Know your facts.
- Try to familiarize yourself with the publication or show you'll be on.
- When talking to the media, tell only what you want the interviewer to know.
- Take time to think of your answers. Don't rush to speak and then regret what you've said. Be careful what you say, and remember that EVERYTHING you say can be used.
- Going 'off the record' is NOT recommended. It's dangerous and there aren't any guarantees. Simply say, 'No, I'm not comfortable with that.'
- Don't be defensive or nasty. Be friendly to the media.
- If possible, try to get to know media people before a 'crisis' situation occurs. Perhaps call and suggest a positive story idea you think would highlight department. On a slow news day, this might be appreciated. WARNING: Don't bother the media incessantly.
- Don't lie or bend the truth; it will come back to haunt you. Don't say 'no comment.' It's OK to say, "I'm not sure how to answer that.'
- Offer documents, charts or other background information if necessary.
- Talk to the reporter, not the camera.
- Don't say anything you don't want printed, heard or seen.
- Don't do an interview unless you feel comfortable with the issues and you know the facts. If you are not expressing the official (county) view, say so. Make it clear if it's your personal point of view.
- Before the interview, try to think of some difficult questions and what you'd answer to them.
- Express yourself concisely and avoid jargon. You're talking to ordinary people! Talk plainly and candidly. Don't bend the truth or try to mislead the reporter. If you don't know the answer, don't fabricate or guess. Say you don't know, and offer to find out the information. If you're not sure about the question, say so.
- Be sincere about how you feel. If it upsets you, or you feel happy about it, or you're frustrated, you can say that.
- Be courteous and diplomatic. Suggest that the reporter call later for clarification if needed.

- Listen to the questions! Make sure you answer them. You can add other information you think is important later.
- Smile! Relax

Packaging Information for the media

We frequently have to interact with members of the media - whether it is newspapers, or radio and TV personnel or other electronic and online media. It may be necessary to highlight an issue that is being advocated, or bring media focus to a controversial issue etc.

The key to courting the media is the message - of packaging the issue or blight or action in a way that will attract the attention of the media, and as an extension its readers, listeners and viewers.

Here is a quick set of guidelines that help in grabbing the attention. It is very broad based, and of course, depends on the actual message being transmitted - but it gives an idea of the direction that has to be taken:

- **Use word pictures that describe the situation.** For example, use comparative ratios like 'three times around the earth' or 'number of soccer fields'. That is, use measures that are familiar and can be easily visualized or shocked into realization ('equal to three trips to the moon').
- **Emphasize the additional features, effects, benefits, or advantages.** What are the interlinkages with other issues or problems? How can communities benefit from the action you are taking?
- **Don't overdo it.** Present the plain facts, in a clear and simple outline. Don't assume that journalists know a lot about the topic or issue you are dealing with. Provide a 'handle' with which the story or byline can be built.
- **Work at the appropriate scale.** Clearly understand the *scale* of the problem or issue and work with the media that best addresses that scale. Regional issues with the appropriate regional media, a local issue with the local media.
- **Stress the human angle.** What ever the issue you are presenting, stress on the human angle - either as the culprits or as the victims. What have humans been doing (or not doing) to result in the situation?
- **Cultivate in-house spokespersons**. In order to maintain a consistent and constant relationship, and to present a message properly, cultivate in-house spokespersons who are comfortable in a public situation and can present a viewpoint clearly and coherently.
- **Be persistent**. Keep the media personnel informed - of breaking issues, progress made and other pertinent details in order to maintain interest.